# Behavior Change Guidance for NOAA Marine Debris Program Marine Debris Prevention Grants

## October 2017

- **Projects that successfully target behavior change should have a clear, defined plan to _measure_ behavior change.** Measuring behavior change is an important component of the FY2018 Marine Debris Prevention grant competition. In order to assess if behavior change has occurred and if the project was successful, there must be a way for behavior change to be measured. This can be done in various ways (e.g. monitoring, pre and post surveys, etc.), with the most appropriate approach depending on the project and the capabilities of the applicant organization. The important part is that the measurement strategy is measuring changes in behavior and not simply evaluating awareness and knowledge. Measurements should also be incorporated in a logical way. For instance, monitoring a beach miles from where project activities are occurring may not produce as useful results as monitoring a beach much closer. Some measurement strategies, such as before and after monitoring for debris, may also require extra time, which should be considered when developing the project timeline. Successful projects should either clearly identify their behavior change measurement strategy, or indicate that they will be working with a behavior change expert to do so.

- **A specific behavior should be identified.** Although we would love to change all behavior associated with the creation of marine debris, behavior change projects will not be effective if the project is not specific enough. A successful behavior change project should identify a specific audience, a specific type of debris (e.g. plastic bags, derelict crab pots, cigarettes, etc.), and a specific behavior to target, with a clear strategy as to how to address and measure that behavior.

- **Proposals should justify project activities for their target audience and targeted behavior.** In order to effectively address and measure behavior change, we must ensure that the project will be appropriate for the audience and that any observed changes in behavior are due to the project activities and not outside factors. Applicants should consider including some sort of pilot study to ensure that the approach is appropriate for the intended audience. This may have already been done prior to submitting a proposal, or may be incorporated into the project proposal. Once it is clear that the project activities are appropriate for the intended audience, it is important to consider other variables that may influence the targeted behavior during the project. For some projects, this can be assessed by the use of a control. For instance, a project may assess the change in a behavior in an area in which the project activities have taken place as well as in an area in which they haven't. Regardless of whether a control is used, confounding factors should be considered and addressed in the project design.

- **What constitutes an effective approach will depend on the location of the project and the targeted community.** Behavior change is a large field with many different strategies and opinions. The MDP has found that there is no one-size-fits-all approach for a successful behavior change project. For this reason, it is important to consider where your project is taking place as well as your target audience, and adapt your approach accordingly. Consider the barriers that your project may have to overcome-- from social norms to lacking infrastructure. This is also why some sort of pilot study may be essential for a project, especially if there has not been a similar initiative in the area before.

- **Finally, a few additional points to keep in mind:**

    - Positive messaging tends to be better received than negative messaging (i.e. "Do this" rather than "Don't do that").

    - Behaviors that are public are more likely to catch on and become social norms.

    - It is important to keep in mind that we are targeting projects that demonstrate a *tangible and measureable change in behavior*, not just changes in knowledge or attitudes